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ABSTRACT

Public debates on student suspension center on issues surrounding due process, racial discrimination, inappropriate uses of suspension, and the fundamental disciplinary value of suspension. This paper examines some fundamental factors influencing student suspension in order to establish a basis for the development of policy alternatives. Detailed data, collected by the congressionally mandated "Safe School Study" from a nationwide subsample of 641 schools, were used in the analyses. The data sets obtained from these schools included results of a mail survey of the school principals, a self-administered questionnaire survey of all 23,895 of their teachers, and the onsite self-administered questionnaire survey of 31,373 students randomly selected from these schools. While students' misbehavior and antisocial attitudes may indeed contribute to an increased likelihood of suspension, findings also show that suspension rates increase if: (1) teachers are seen by students as relatively uninterested in them, (2) teachers believe that students are incapable of solving problems, (3) disciplinary matters are handled largely by administrative rules, (4) the school is not able to provide consistent and fair governance, (5) there is a relatively high degree of academic bias among school personnel, and (6) there is a relatively high degree of racial bias present at the school. (Author/MLF)

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STUDENT SUSPENSION: A CRITICAL REAPPRAISAL*

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Using a nationally representative sample frame, this paper will explore why students are suspended from school. In going beyond the usual interest in who is suspended, our concern is in discovering if suspension can be characterized as an individual phenomenon or a school phenomenon. This is an important distinction vis-a-vis educational policy. Such a distinction would lead to attention being focused on either (a) finding promising ways to reduce individual student misbehavior and to induce more socially acceptable behavior, or (b) restructuring the schooling process to remove practices that increase the rates of anti-social behavior and suspension.

School suspension is not a new issue. Rather, suspension of students from school has been a subject of considerable public debate in recent years (Edelman et al, 1975; Neill, 1976; Garibaldi, 1979). The public debate covers a wide range of issues. One of the most important issues deals with the provision of procedural due process in suspension cases. Some observers charge that suspension takes place frequently without students being given oral or written notice of the charges against them, and without them having the opportunity to present their side of the story at a hearing. The lack of due process provisions such as notice and hearing has been considered particularly serious in short term suspension cases (Lines, 1977).

In 1975, the U.S. Supreme Court in two separate decisions stated that students facing temporary suspension have property and liberty interests substantial enough to qualify them for protection under the due process clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The first decision (Goss v.

Lopez)[1] mandated minimum due process procedures for students in suspension cases, and the second (Wood v. Strickland)[2] made school boards liable for damages in such cases. The Supreme Court's affirmation of the rights of students to due process was applauded by those who advocate reforms in disciplinary practices at schools. To others, however, schools in general have not abused the individual rights of the students who are accused of violating the school rules. The latter argue that it is not the first impulse of school administrators to suspend or expel students when confronted with student misconduct. They also say that suspension practices have been largely fair, with due process procedures being closely followed. To them, the Supreme Court's requirement of minimum due process was considered a further erosion of the power and the ability of school administrators to run schools in the best interest of the majority of the students.

Other issues besides the general question of procedural due process make suspension a subject of public debate. Suspension attracts considerable national attention because of the possibility of discrimination, especially racial discrimination; this has been pointed out by civil rights and child advocacy groups. Among others, the Children's Defense Fund in two well-known reports asserts that minority pupils, especially black pupils, have been suspended at a rate highly disproportionate to their total enrollment. The disproportionately high suspension rate for blacks and other minorities, in comparison to that for whites, is considered evidence of racial discrimination in disciplinary actions.

Some consider higher rates of suspension among minority students to be simply a product of more misbehavior at school. Others suggest that disproportionate suspension rates for minorities could be better explained by the fact that schools are middle class institutions with middle class people

teaching and administering them. It is the different cultural orientation of the largely low socio-economic status minority students, in conflict with the middle class orientation of the school, that explains their higher suspension rate, not racial bias. Still others consider that academic records, not race, are the better explanation of student suspension, since regardless of race, most suspended students are academically deficient (see Neill, 1976). Clearly, these differing views have yet to be resolved.

The fundamental value of suspension has also been widely debated. To the opponents of suspension, it is not considered helpful to suspend students. They have emphasized the plight of students during the period out of school as (a) the traumatic feeling of loss of self-respect and of being unwanted, (b) the increasing chance of coming into contact with a delinquent subculture, (c) the vicious cyclical effects of being unable to catch up with school work, and (d) the stigma among peers after suspension (Williams, 1979). They have also argued that suspended students have frequently become school dropouts. The severely damaging consequences of suspension is seen to greatly outweigh whatever potential disciplinary value it has.

It has been suggested that suspension is often a knee-jerk response to student misbehavior on the part of school personnel (Neill, 1976). The temporary removal of students from school not only fails to solve the problem of student misbehavior, but the arbitrariness of such removal could worsen school disciplinary problems and thus create an opposite effect (Mizell, 1978; Williams, 1979).

To the proponents of suspension, on the other hand, suspension is seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning process in school. However, while some consider suspension a necessary means to cope with student misconduct, most regard it as a stop-gap measure needed for protecting individuals and school property and for the smooth running of the educational

process in school. They suggest that suspension, like any other disciplinary measure, may at least reduce the chances of recurrence of misbehavior for a short period of time immediately after the suspension. They argue that it serves the purpose of pointing out the seriousness of misconduct, thus helping students develop self-control and acceptable behavior at school. It may also serve as a deterrent, an instruction to other students not to commit the kind of behavior for which suspension is imposed. In addition, the proponents of suspension have also viewed suspension as being needed sometimes to get parents involved in situations where they have not previously cooperated with the school in its efforts to solve the behavior problems of their children. More philosophically, the proponents have argued that the majority of the students who are interested in learning should not have to suffer from the constant disruption of the very few (Neill, 1976; Garibaldi, 1979; U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 1976).

Issues surrounding due process, racial discrimination, inappropriate uses of suspension, and the fundamental disciplinary value of suspension, are the four areas in the public debates on student suspension. The intensity involved in these debates is not simply a matter of different personal convictions or ideological positions between the proponents and opponents on each of these issues. It is also indicative of the perceived importance of student suspension which needs serious consideration in the nation's public schools.

Even without statistical information, it should be clear that while students are suspended for misbehavior or for violation of school rules, not all the misbehaving students experience suspension. Misbehavior such as smoking at school could be grounds for suspension, but not all smoking on school grounds leads to suspension. This means that there are other factors involved. (Rubel, 1977).

What then are the other factors that contribute to suspension? We still do not know. More systematic research is thus badly needed. From the records of the public debates, it is rather clear that less suspension is commonly preferred by both proponents and opponents of student suspension. Since it seems widely agreed that suspensions are unfortunate, we will assume in this paper that a reduction of suspension is a worthwhile goal. With this in mind, our principle purpose here is to examine some fundamental factors influencing student suspensions, and not to inquire into the wide-ranging issues of the debates. Although our discussion will have important bearing on some of the issues in the debate, it is our firm belief that only through further identification of the fundamental factors involved can we improve our understanding of student suspensions as a problem, and thus develop policy alternatives to resolve this problem.

This paper uses data collected by the Congressionally mandated Safe School Study (NIE, 1978). This study was intended to answer questions related to student misbehavior and crimes at school rather than those related to student suspension. Nevertheless, these large scale national data allow us to examine some important questions about student suspensions. Readers who wish to know more about the range of student misbehavior at school are encouraged to consult the Safe School Study Report.

The Safe School Study was intended to answer a number of questions related to crimes and violence in the nation's public schools. It was based on a national survey taken in 1976, of more than 4500 elementary and secondary schools. This sample of schools consisted of two subsamples--3910 "Phase I study schools, and 641 "Phase II" study schools, differentiated by the amount of information which was collected about each. To study suspensions, we utilize the more detailed data pertaining to the Phase II schools. These 641

schools were selected to represent all public secondary schools in the entire nation through a two-staged stratified sampling procedure that took into consideration the geographic location (region), the type of community (urban, suburban, and rural), educational level (junior and senior high schools), and the school size (student enrollment). The data sets obtained from these schools included the results of a mail survey of the school principals, a self-administered questionnaire survey of all 23,895 of their teachers, and the on-site self-administered questionnaire survey of 31,373 students randomly selected from these schools. We take advantage of all three subsets of data for various analytical purposes.

Our discussion on student suspensions is divided as follows. In Section I, we discuss the extent of suspension. The description and discussion of the extent of student suspensions are not meant for national estimates or projections: they are presented to give the reader a rough view of the likelihood of students being suspended and of some general broad patterns. In Section II, we will discuss the relationship between student misbehavior at school and suspension. After examining student misbehavior as the most obvious factor in suspension, additional factors are then considered in the subsequent sections. In Section III, we examine the possibility of teachers' judgments and attitudes as potential factors in suspension. In Section III, we examine whether student suspension is related to the administrative structure of schools in the handling of student disciplinary matters. In Section V, we consider the possibility of academic ability as a potential factor in suspension. Finally, in Section VI, the possibility of the interference of racial bias is discussed.

I. The Extent of Student Suspension

How frequently are students suspended from school? To see how widespread is the suspension experience, we rely on student responses, from the seventh through twelfth grade, to the question: "Have you ever been suspended from this school?" Since the questionnaire was not originally constructed with a view to analysis on suspension, we are unable to measure either (a) at what specific time the suspension took place, or (b) the number of times, or duration, of the suspension(s). Our focus here, then, is on the likelihood of suspension during the secondary school years.

We should also note that these data do not contain responses of students who were either absent or suspended during the administration of the questionnaire. Consequently, our analysis will yield a conservative estimate of suspension rates. However, the purpose of this paper is not to present precise estimates of suspension rates, but rather to explore factors which help explain variations in suspension rates.

Probability of Suspension by Educational Level and Community Type

Of the 31,103 students surveyed, 3,455 indicated that they had been suspended from their school. In other words, about 11 percent of the students surveyed had been suspended at least once from their school. As we classify the students according to the educational level and the type of community in which their schools are located, we notice that the chances of being suspended from school are not equal for all students.

Table I demonstrates that more students in urban schools are suspended than are students attending suburban or rural schools. Also, more suburban students are suspended than are rural students within the same kinds of schools. Considering junior and senior high school students separately, we

notice that in both cases urban school students have the highest suspension rates, suburban school students the second highest, and rural school students the lowest rates. Urban schools are defined as those within a city of 50,000 or more population. Suburban schools are located in the remainder of the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) which have such a city as their center. Rural schools are located in small towns and rural areas outside of SMSAs.

In urban areas, about 15 percent of the students in both types of schools are suspended, but in suburban areas 13 percent of the senior high students have been suspended while only 8 percent of the junior high students have had the same experience. In rural areas, more than 9 percent of senior high school students have been suspended from school as compared to less than 7 percent for the junior high students. The generally higher percentage of senior high school students suspended may in part be because of the possibility that senior high school students, on the average, stay in their schools for a longer period of time. Hence their students could have a longer period of exposure to the chance of being suspended. We turn now to this possibility.

Probability of Suspension by Grade Level

In general, more senior high than junior high students have been suspended from school. Is this higher suspension rate among senior high school students a matter of their longer attendance rather than more frequent suspensions carried out by their schools? In Table 2, we compare suspension rates between senior and junior high school students by the duration of their attendance. Each student was asked how long he or she had gone to the school at the time of questionnaire administration. The answer to this question enables us to place students into one of four broad duration of attendance categories:

1) less than one year, 2) one or two years, 3) three or four years and 4) five or more years. The results show that except in urban communities, when students have been in school for three years or longer, senior high school students have a higher suspension rate in all four duration categories. The difference is most marked among the first-year students. In urban areas, 10 percent of the first year senior high students were suspended as compared to 9 percent for the junior high students. In suburban communities, 9 percent of the senior high students were suspended during their first year at school as compared to 5 percent among the first year junior high students. The comparable figures in rural areas are 8 for the senior high students and 4 for the junior high students. The figures presented in Table 2 are rough; they cannot be used in the computation of an incremental change of suspension rates from one time point to another. Neither can they be considered to be the actual extent of suspension among students in high schools. One obvious reason is that the available information does not take into consideration dropouts or transferred students, many of whom presumably had been suspended prior to their exit from their schools. The suspension rate among students who have been in school for five years or more is lower in some cases than the rate for students who have been in school for only three or four years, as we see in Table 2 for the suburban and rural schools. This could well indicate that many suspended students drop out before they reach the fifth year of school, or reflect a reduced role for low suspension in multigrade consolidated schools.

The probability of a student being suspended from school is probably underestimated in these data. But dropout rates are generally higher among older students, so complete suspension rates for them might be even higher. We conclude that higher suspension rates among the senior high students in fact indicate that their schools do suspend more students each year, and are not due to a longer period of attendance.

We can analyze suspension rates for each of the secondary school years. These grade-specific suspension rates are closely related to the suspension rates by duration of attendance, because students in the higher grades are likely to have been in school longer. However, the combination of grade-specific suspension rates with type of school, offers a better view of different suspension rates from one period of time to another. The suspension rates for seventh through ninth graders in the junior high schools and ninth through twelfth graders in the senior high schools are reported in Table 3. The information reported here, together with that reported in Table 2, suggests that students are most likely to be suspended during their first year in school. We cannot gauge the extent of forgetting which occurs over the longer period, however, even though suspension is presumably a serious event which should be remembered better than many other life events. This may limit the accuracy of reporting on suspensions which occurred longer ago, and could help account for the lack of proportionate increases in suspensions with longer duration of attendance.

In urban senior high schools, 16 percent of the seniors were suspended at least once in the three to four years that they attended school. However, 11 percent of the ninth graders in the same high schools were suspended during only one year of attendance. This suggests that the students who will be suspended in high school appear to be suspended during their first year, and as the students move to the upper grades and stay in school for a longer period, the additional risk of being suspended for the first time decreases. In junior high schools, by contrast, student suspensions display a somewhat different pattern--although a substantial number of students were suspended in the seventh grade, over twice as many ninth graders were suspended from junior high school as seventh graders, suggesting that many ninth graders are suspended for the first time in their last year of junior high school.

The implication of these trends is worth exploring. The fact that first suspensions so frequently occur in the seventh grade in junior high school and in the ninth grade in senior high school suggests that the first year in a new school may be a difficult period. Does this suggest that during the first year students display more behavior problems, or does it imply that during the first year students are simply not familiar with the school rules and disciplinary practices? If the latter is true, they may get suspended more, not so much because their behavior is different from students in the higher grades, but because they have not been in school long enough to be able to avoid being caught and suspended when they misbehave. There are other possibilities; (a) could it be that school authorities are somewhat more strict with beginning students, over whom they are eager to exercise their control, or (b) is this a particularly difficult period of middle adolescence? Our data, regretfully, cannot answer such critical questions.

Probability of Suspension by Sex, Race, and Socio-Economic Status

The probability of suspension from school for a student not only varies according to the type of community in which the school is located and the level of the school, it also varies according to the student's sex, race, and socio-economic background. Table 4 shows that male students in every kind of school location and level are more likely to be suspended than their female counterparts. Suspension experience is higher for males in all the six sub-groups of schools.

Tables 6 and 7 show the suspension rates for students who differ in family socio-economic status. In Table 6, we notice that students whose fathers do not have a full-time job are more likely to have suspension experience than those whose fathers do. In Table 7, we notice that the students who receive free lunches at school are more likely to have suspension

experience than those who do not. Thus, in general, students whose families are at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum tend to be more frequently suspended from school.

II. Attitudinal and Behavioral Basis of Student Suspensions

Schools have often been criticized for suspending their students arbitrarily. To what extent is this true? We suggest that the minimum necessary condition for the imposition of suspension is student misbehavior. If such a minimum condition is not met, then we will assert that suspension is totally arbitrary. If suspension is totally arbitrary and without any behavioral basis, then the foundation or the legitimacy of suspension becomes questionable, regardless of its practical value. Empirically, then, our first task is to examine whether in fact there is an association between students' behavior and attitudes and their actual experience of suspension.

If suspensions have a firm behavioral basis, we should find a positive association between students' antisocial attitudes and suspension. Clearly, antisocial attitudes must not be confused with misconduct or behavior in violation of school rules. Students are supposedly suspended because of their deviant behavior rather than their antisocial attitudes or beliefs. But normally, as in this study, we do not have information about the kinds and frequencies of deviant behavior that each individual student had committed at school. Thus, the relationship between students' behavioral profiles and suspensions cannot be directly examined. However, it is reasonable to assume that students with more antisocial attitudes are also more likely to engage in deviant behavior. While people do not always act on their attitudes, attitudes do indicate tendencies toward certain actions. Thus, we would

expect that those students with more antisocial attitudes would be suspended from their schools more often than those with less antisocial or deviant attitudes.

To examine this relationship we first construct an Antisocial Attitude Index (See Table 34). The index is constructed on the basis of individual student responses to the following eight items taken from the Student Questionnaire (Agree-Undecided-Disagree responses possible):

1) People who leave things around deserve it if their things get taken
2) Taking things from stores doesn't hurt anyone
3) People who get beat up usually asked for it
4) If you want to get ahead, you can't always be honest
5) Would you cheat on a test (if you could get away with it)
6) Would you spray paint on school walls (if.....)
7) Would you take money from other students (if.....)
8) Would you skip school (if.....)

Each item was weighted equally in the index.

The simple Pearson correlation coefficients between this index of antisocial attitudes and the students' actual experience of suspension were calculated for each of the secondary school grades seven through twelve (Table 8). We find that antisocial attitudes are positively correlated with actual suspension. That is, the greater the degree to which a student displayed antisocial attitudes, the more likely that he or she had been suspended from the currently attended school at one time or another. This pattern holds true for all the twenty-one subsets of analysis in urban, suburban and rural junior and senior high schools.[3]

One could argue that the antisocial attitudes expressed in the attitude index are not the causes of suspension, but are the effect. Students who are

suspended express more hostile attitudes because of the way they have been treated by the system. This might explain the high correlation between being suspended and approval of skipping school and cheating. However, we see no reason why being suspended from school would lead a student to approve of stealing from other students or from stores--in all likelihood they are not activities responsible for his suspension. It is more reasonable to argue, as we have, that antisocial attitudes precede suspension.

The consistent results of the twenty-one subsets of analysis covering seventh through ninth graders in junior high schools, and ninth through twelfth graders in senior high schools, in all types of communities, thus strongly indicate that suspension of students does have a behavioral basis. To the extent that this is true, suspension as a disciplinary measure cannot be considered totally arbitrary. We are sure that suspension is, in fact, a function of students' antisocial attitudes. From this we may safely infer that student misbehavior is indeed a basic determinant of whether a student will be suspended from school. This is further supported by the school level analysis.

This simple correlational analysis is based on the individual students as the analytical units. This analysis allows us to draw the inference that student misbehavior is a basic determinant of suspension. But as we have stated earlier, simply knowing that students with more antisocial attitudes are more likely to be suspended does not in itself prove that schools have high suspension rates because their students cause more problems. In order to check on that, we need to shift from the analysis of individual students to an analysis of schools, and ask whether schools with more hostile student bodies have higher suspension rates. This shift is necessary because data on hostile behavior of students are available only from teachers' reports which refer to student bodies rather than individual students.

In this school analysis, we look at each school in turn, correlating the aggregate characteristics of the student body to the percentage of the students who say they have been suspended from that school. If students' antisocial attitudes and misbehavior are truly basic determinants of suspension, we would expect that those schools with a less antisocial and better-behaved student body should have a smaller proportion of students with suspension experience. In this school level analysis, we construct a scale that includes both a student body's attitudes and behavior. To measure antisocial attitudes of a student body in the aggregate, we use 1) the percentage of students who disagree that "taking things from stores doesn't hurt anyone, 2) the percentage of students who disagree that "if you want to get ahead, you can't always be honest," 3) the percentage of students who say that they would spray paint on school walls, and 4) the percentage of students who say they would take money from other students. These four indicators of student attitudes are taken from the eight items included in the individual antisocial attitudes index. To measure the extent of good behavior among students, we use two indicators: 1) the percentage of teachers who say that they were never sworn at by their students, and 2) the percentage of teachers who say that they were never threatened by their students.[4]

In view of the fact that all of the four attitudinal indicators and the two behavioral indicators are negatively correlated with the percentage of students with suspension experience, and the fact all of these six indicators are intercorrelated, we further develop a scale that will maximize the common variance shared by these six indicators (see Table 36). This scale is called here the Attitudes/Behavior Scale. In Table 9, we show that the schools' scores on this scale are significantly correlated with their student bodies' suspension experience. This holds true both for junior high and senior high schools, regardless of the type of community. Thus, the school level analysis

together with the individual level analysis previously discussed, provides unmistakable evidence that student behavior and attitudes are in fact a basic determinant of student suspension. From the results of the school level analysis shown in Table 9, we further notice that the extent of student suspension experience is better explained by student attitudes/behavior in junior high schools than in senior high schools in the same kinds of localities.[5]

Clearly, the fact that individual students' attitudes and behavior are basic determinants of suspension does not mean that they are the only determinants of suspension. Neither should we conclude from these findings that suspension is therefore inevitable as schools are confronted with student misbehavior. Consequently, we must determine whether suspension is, in part, the result of school policies, rather than simply of student behavior. Would a student be equally likely to be suspended regardless of school attended? To answer this question, we will look at the effect on suspension of a variety of school characteristics. In each case, we will compare the power of the school characteristic to predict student suspension, to the power of the student attitude scale (at the individual level of analysis) or the Attitudes/Behavior Scale (at the school level) in a multiple regression analysis.

If schools were not arbitrary, then a regression equation would show the school characteristic having no independent effect; all the variance in suspension being explained by student attitudes and behavior. At least this would be the case if our attitude and attitudes/behavior scales were perfect measures of student propensity to cause trouble at school. Of course they are not, which means that a school characteristic may appear to be related to suspension after controlling on student attitudes and behavior only because the school characteristic is related to student characteristics we did not record. For this reason our analysis must proceed carefully. We must consider

not only whether a school factor is related to suspension, but more importantly the strength of the relationship. From what we know about the correlation of the school characteristics with both suspension rates and the Attitudes/Behavior Scale, how likely is it that a better measurement of student propensity to cause trouble would wash out the effect of the school characteristic? This is one type of argument we must consider in the subsequent analysis.

A second type of argument is the possibility that the school characteristic is not a cause of suspension, but is in fact caused by suspensions. (The number of suspension notices mailed to parents will predict perfectly the number of suspensions; but the notices do not cause the suspensions to happen.) In general, if a is correlated with s (a in this case being a school characteristic and s the probability of suspension for an individual or a rate of suspension for an entire school) there are exactly 3 possibilities: a is a cause of s; s is a cause of a; or they are both caused by a third factor, b. (In our case, b is usually the misbehavior of the student or the average misbehavior of the school student body, and is imperfectly measured by the student attitude and attitudes/behavior scales.) Our analysis will take the form of regressing s on b and a simultaneously and analyzing the result to see if the hypothesis that a causes s is reasonable. To further illustrate this point, we conduct one such multiple regression analysis, using individual students' suspension experience as the dependent variable and their antisocial attitude index score and their schools' suspension rates as the two predictors while controlling for the duration of their attendance at the school. The school suspension rate for a student is measured here by the proportion of students who have been suspended from school before, among all fellow students at the school, excluding that specific student. This multiple regression analysis is again carried out separately for each of the major grades in both

in both junior and senior high schools in all types of communities (see Table 10).

The data demonstrate that in a majority of cases the proportion of other students having suspension experience is as strong a factor as a student's own antisocial attitudes in explaining whether or not he or she has actually been suspended. In fact, as we compare the partial regression coefficients of the student's own antisocial attitudes (the ASAI column) and of the proportion of other students with suspension experience (the SSRO column) we notice that the proportion of other students with suspension experience is as strong or a stronger predictor than the student's antisocial attitudes in 13 of the total of 21 subsets of analysis.

What this means is that we can predict with some accuracy whether students will be suspended by their attitudes about cheating, skipping school, robbing stores or other students, and so forth. However, we can predict better whether a student will be suspended by knowing nothing at all about the student and knowing only how frequently other students in his or her school have been suspended. This implies that schools differ considerably in their suspension policies and practices--that a student with a particular set of attitudes would be suspended in a school which suspends a large number of students and not suspended in a school which uses suspension less frequently. In short, whether a student is suspended or not is as much a matter of the school's policy and practices as it is matter of the student's behavior. One could argue from this finding that if students are interested in reducing their chances of being suspended, they will be better off by transferring to a school with a lower suspension rate rather than by improving their attitudes or reducing their misbehavior. Thus, one cannot simply focus on the improvement or the alteration of students' behavior as the sole means of reducing suspension,

if such reduction is the goal of society. Instead, greater attention must be directed toward the policies and the practices by which schools respond or react to the misbehavior of students.

In summary, we have found that students' antisocial attitudes and misbehavior do explain suspension. Since the probability of a student being suspended is determined by his behavior, schools must not be considered as totally arbitrary in their administration of suspension. They are not arbitrary in the sense that the student's behavior is unimportant in the school authority's decision to suspend students. Those students who are likely to misbehave or those who are likely to misbehave more frequently do find themselves more likely to be suspended by their schools. On the other hand, we find suspension to be more often an outcome of the liberal use of suspension than an outcome of student misbehavior. That suspension is a school phenomenon rather than an individual one is reflected by the fact that given a student's behavior, his probability of experiencing suspension is greatly increased if one goes to a school where more students have been suspended.

III. Teacher Judgments and Attitudes and Student Suspension

In the previous section we discussed the fact that student antisocial attitudes and misbehavior are not the only factors that lead to suspension. The next question we will ask is whether the teacher's judgments or attitudes contribute to student suspension. One of the ways in which teachers may influence suspension is through their personal contact with, and interest in, students. If teachers are personally interested in students and have close personal contact with them, it would seem reasonable to expect that the teachers will be more likely to have favorable perceptions of their students;

consequently they should be less likely to impose or advocate severe and damaging sanctions when confronted with student misbehavior, or at least occasional misbehavior. In this kind of environment, we may well expect less suspension. In other words, personal interest by the teachers in students and personal contact between teachers and students could create or facilitate the development of a favorable "bias" or expectation that may decrease the probability of students being suspended from school, should they misbehave. Of course, it is highly probable that teachers' interest in, and personal contact with, students may also directly reduce students' misbehavior and antisocial attitudes, as was found in the Safe School Study (NIE, 1978). Students would therefore benefit from the additional decrease in the probability of suspension because of improved behavior due to teachers' personal interest and contact. However, our question here is simply whether students benefit from teachers' favorable bias or expectation.

If teachers' judgments do not play a role in student suspension, then we would expect that the extent of student suspension would not be affected by the extent of their personal interest in students. In other words, teachers' interest in students would not decrease the rate of student suspension, and conversely the lack of such interest would not increase students' chances of suspension. This possibility is examined in Table 11. Here the percentage of students who believe that their teachers are not interested in them is used as the indicator of the teachers' lack of personal interest in their students. Lack of interest among teachers does appear to be positively correlated with student suspension. The bottom line of Table 11 shows that the schools where more students report that their teachers are not interested in them have more students with actual suspension experience. The results of the multiple regression analysis show (the second line of Table 11) that with student attitudes/behavior held constant, the schools where teachers are less personally

interested in students suspend more of their students. This holds true among all subsets of schools except the urban junior high schools. However, student attitudes/behavior is a more powerful predictor of suspension in each type of school.

This finding is subject to two interpretations. First, it could simply mean that schools with high suspension rates have students who are hostile to the school, and will blame the school personnel at any opportunity. Thus, the fact that the students say that the teachers are not interested does not really tell us anything about the faculty. Second, we can hypothesize that the students are making a reasonably accurate judgment about the teachers in the school. We believe this latter interpretation is more plausible, especially when we bear in mind that the data used here are the responses of all students, not merely the suspended minority. In schools with high suspension rates, a larger fraction of the entire student body sees the teachers as uninterested. This interpretation means that uninterested teachers have an impact on student suspension. It implies that some students would not have been suspended if teachers had a greater interest in them personally.

This line of reasoning is further supported by the individual level analysis. Table 12 shows that an individual student's experience of suspension is indeed positively correlated with the proportion of students in his school who say the teachers are not interested in students in general. This means that an individual student with suspension experience, as compared to one who has not been suspended, is more likely to have attended a school where more students say their teachers are not interested. Suspended students are more likely to have an uninterested faculty.

We have three possible explanations of this finding. It does not seem possible that the suspension of one student would change the entire student

body's assessment of all their teachers. The relationship could be spurious; badly behaved students are more likely to be suspended and more likely to attend schools in low-income neighborhoods with other badly behaved students who would complain a lot about their teachers. The problem with this explanation is that even in the "toughest" schools, the trouble makers are a minority only, and the reports that teachers appear uninterested come from the entire student body. The more reasonable interpretation seems to be that the teachers' lack of interest increases an individual student's chances of receiving a suspension. Thus, when more students say their teachers are not interested, more students are likely to experience suspension and the probability of experiencing suspension for any single student goes up. In Table 13 we test to see if the relationship is spurious by using the student antisocial attitude score along with the percentage of peers in the school who say teachers are not interested to predict that student's chances of suspension. The results show that with a student's antisocial attitudes and duration of attendance held constant, the probability of suspension is greater in schools where more students say their teachers are not interested. This is reflected by the positive partial regression coefficients of the percentage of students who say their teachers are not interested in seventeen of the twenty-one subsets of the analysis.[6] However, in no case is the teacher's interest as strong a predictor as the student's antisocial attitude index.

Students' chances of being suspended are not only affected by their teachers' interest in them personally, they are also affected by the ways in which teachers perceive them. One type of teacher perception appears to be particularly relevant to student suspension; that is, whether the teacher perceives students as capable of solving their problems through logical reasoning. In the questionnaire presented to the teachers in the Safe School

Study survey, each was asked to indicate his or her personal opinion about the following statement: "Pupils are usually not capable of solving their problems through logical reasoning." Answer categories were "strongly disagree", "disagree", "undecided", "agree", or "strongly agree". On the average, one-fifth to one-third of the teachers in a school either agreed or strongly agreed, depending on the level and location of the school: More junior high teachers than senior high school teachers thought their students were incapable of solving problems, and more urban teachers thought so than their suburban or rural counterparts.

Regardless of school level and location, however, we find in all the six subsets of schools that the school suspension rate is positively correlated with the percentage of teachers in a school who agree or strongly agree that pupils are usually incapable of solving their problems (see Table 14, bottom row). One interpretation of this positive correlation could be that when a school has a very high suspension rate, its teachers might become increasingly defensive in their response to the potential criticisms of such a high rate; they develop a view which asserts that students are usually incompetent at solving their own problems in order to justify the high suspension rate. Such an interpretation hinges upon a process of rationalization on the part of the teachers. In general, however, teachers are not directly responsible for deciding whether a misbehaving student is to be suspended or otherwise punished; thus, the rationalization process does not seem to be an entirely adequate explanation.

A more probable explanation, we think, is that when many teachers in a school believe that students are incompetent to solve their problems, they indirectly promote, perpetuate, or at least, facilitate the development of a climate in the school that favors suspension as a solution to student misbehavior. In other words, it is the <u>belief</u> of student incompetence among

teachers that causes a high suspension rate, and not the other way around. If competence at solving problems is taken by the school to be the exception among students rather than the general rule, then it should be quite natural to believe that students with problems at school are so incompetent that the school has no choice but to remove them from the school. Thus, the belief of student incompetence in problem solving would increase suspension: when more teachers see students as incapable of solving problems, more students in the school are likely to be suspended.

Although we believe that it is teachers' perception of student incompetence which causes suspension and not vice versa, we need to consider still another possibility--there may not be a direct relationship between teachers' belief and student suspension at all. The positive correlation between teachers' belief of student incompetence and suspension rates could be due to their being both caused by a hostile and misbehaving student body. To check this possibility, we regress the suspension rate on the attitudes/behavior of the student body and on the percentage of teachers with the belief of student incompetence, simultaneously. Since teachers' interest in students has been found to be a contributing factor in suspensions, we will also enter this factor into the regression equation. The results of this multiple regression analysis (Table 14) show that although there is a general reduction in the association between teachers' belief of student incompetence and suspension rate when we control on student body's attitudes and behavior, the partial regression coefficient of teachers' believing student incompetence is still considerable. This means that although it is partially true that when students are more antisocial and more frequently misbehaving, the teachers are more likely to think of students as incompetent, or vice versa[7], the belief of student incompetence in itself still has a direct contribution to the increase of suspension rate.

This in turn means that, given student attitudes/behavior and the amount of interest that teachers have in the students, some of the suspensions we observed are a result of teachers' perception of students' inability to solve problems. This finding generally holds, with the exception of the rural junior high schools. With respect to the role of teachers' perception in suspension, however, we must point out that we are not stating here that students are suspended because they are incapable of solving their problems. What we are saying is that, when teachers think students are incapable of solving problems, they are likely to be less patient or less tolerant when students misbehave. The impatience and intolerance of the teachers could therefore promote a school climate less constrained against suspending students. These data suggest that it is highly probable that student suspension rates would decrease if this kind of perception among teachers were reduced.

The important role in student suspension played by teachers' perception regarding student capability of solving their problems can also be demonstrated at the individual level. In Table 15 we notice that the individual students' experience with suspension is positively correlated with the percentage of teachers in their school who agree that pupils are generally incapable of solving problems. This holds true in all the 21 subsets of analysis. Moreover, when we regress individual students' suspension experience on their antisocial scores and their teachers' perception of the school's students, we notice (Table 16) that for a student, given his or her antisocial attitudes or behavior, the probability of receiving suspension increases if he or she goes to a school with more teachers perceiving students as incapable of solving problems. This again holds true in all the 21 subsets of analysis. The importance of such a perception is thus unmistakably clear.

Given the fact that teachers' interest in students decreases the probability of experiencing suspension by students, and that teachers'

perception of students as incapable of solving problems has an opposite effect, the subjective judgments and attitudes of the teachers thus appear to be highly relevant to student suspension. To the extent that teacher judgments, attitudes, or perceptions also determine whether students are suspended, teachers must be involved in any attempt to reduce suspensions. We can no longer insist that the only means through which suspensions could be reduced is to alter students' behavior and attitudes. Our findings strongly suggest that a substantial reduction in suspension rates could be achieved through elimination of apathy and indifference among teachers, and through cultivation of better images of students by teachers.

IV. Authority Structure and Discipline Administration

We have stated that suspension appears to be very much the product of a school's disciplinary policy and practices. If student suspension is a product of school disciplinary policy and practices, then the way in which a school organizes and operates its disciplinary activities should have some impact on its suspension rate. In particular, how the school controls or governs its students, and how it reaches disciplinary decisions concerning student misconduct, may have direct bearing on student chances of being suspended. If student suspension is found to be related to any characteristics of the way schools govern students, this would suggest that suspension may be indeed a problem of school management, and not merely a problem of student misconduct. Thus, the organizational structure of discipline and the quality of student governance will be the focus of this section.

Administrative Centralization and Student Suspensions

A fundamental way of observing the differences in organizational structure among schools is to examine how decision-making power or authority is distributed among school personnel. With respect to student disciplinary matters, in general, schools differ in the degree to which discretionary power is given to teachers regarding disciplinary matters. In some schools, disciplinary matters are handled strictly according to the provision of administrative rules; thus the school administration has centralized control over such matters. In contrast, other schools give individual teachers greater discretionary power; in such cases, authority over student discipline is more diffused or decentralized. Does administrative centralization or decentralization make any difference in student suspensions?

In the national survey, each teacher was asked to indicate how his/her school deals with serious student behavior problems such as fighting, disobedience, etc. There are four possible answers: A teacher may indicate that such problems are handled (1) by specific administrative rule, (2) by a general policy interpreted by teacher, or (3) by each individual teacher setting policy, or he/she may indicate that (4) it is impossible to say.

We use the percentage of teachers in a school who state that serious student behavior problems are dealt with by specific administrative rules, response one, as the indicator of the degree to which disciplinary matters in that school are centralized and controlled. This indicator of centralized administrative control over student discipline correlated positively with the percentage of students who have been suspended (see Table 17). In other words, our data show that more students have been suspended in schools where there is a high degree of administrative centralization in disciplinary matters. This positive correlation is observed in all six subsets of schools.

In a casual sense, this would mean that a high degree of administrative centralization or administrative control in student discipline leads to more suspension among students.

In making a causal interpretation, however, we must notice that there are two other alternative interpretations: On the one hand, it is possible that when students' misbehavior is common, teachers may be more likely to state that student disciplinary matters are under the control of the school administration. This is possible because where there are frequent suspensions, the teachers could wish to feel that they were not responsible for the school's discipline problems. If discipline is within the realm of administrative control, then they are not to be blamed for either students' misconduct or for their suspensions. This alternative interpretation would challenge the accuracy of using the percentage of teachers indicating that student behavior problems are handled by specific administrative rules as a measure of administrative centralization. Instead, it would be considered to be a measure of teachers' tendency to avoid blame when misbehavior is a serious problem at school. On the other hand, it is also possible that administrative centralization itself could be a product or a consequence of student misbehavior: when confronted with frequent student misbehavior, a school may be increasingly forced to adapt a centralized administrative structure in order to achieve a higher degree of efficiency in coping with the problems. This second alternative interpretation would suggest that there is no true relationship between administrative centralization and student suspension; the correlation we have observed between them could well be explained by their common antecedent, namely frequent student misconduct.

To take these two alternative interpretations into consideration, we further regress the percentage of students with suspension experience on the

percentage of teachers who consider disciplinary matters to be handled largely by administrative rules, while the effects of student attitudes/behavior and other factors are held constant. These other factors are the main aspect of teacher judgments and attitudes considered in the last section. The results displayed in Table 17 indicate that the partial regression coefficients of administrative centralization are only slightly reduced from their correlations with the student suspension rate after taking into account the three other variables included in this analysis. This means that even if we allow for the two alternative interpretations stated above, the administratively centralized schools still suspend more students. Furthermore, when we compare the multiple R^2s in Table 14 to those in Table 17, we notice that the R^2s in in the latter table are somewhat larger. Such increases are attributable to the adding of administrative centralization to the multiple regression equation. This in turn means that by knowing the degree of administrative centralization in a school, we are able to predict the suspension rate of that school more accurately than without knowing it.

Administrative centralization of disciplinary matters does have an additional impact on increasing students' chances of receiving suspensions. For example, our data show that for urban senior high schools, with student attitudes/behavior held constant, if a school increases administrative centralization by one standard deviation (or 17% more teachers say that student behavior problems are handled by specific administrative rules), the student suspension rate is likely to go up by .418 standard deviation (or about 5% more students will have suspension experience). The positive impact of administrative centralization on suspensions is, in fact, observed in all six subsets of schools.

We may further note that the importance of administrative centralization is even more apparent in the senior high schools. In two of the three subsets

of senior high schools, namely the urban senior high schools and those in mostly rural areas, the degree of administrative centralization appears to be the single most powerful predictor of student suspension, more powerful than students' attitudes/behavior. In the suburban schools and rural junior high schools, however, student attitudes/behavior is the most powerful predictor of student suspension, but degree of centralization is still relatively strong. Thus the empirical evidence strongly support the hypothesis that centralized administrative control of disciplinary matters leads to more suspension.

The impact of centralization on student suspension can also be demonstrated on the individual level (Table 18). These data show that suspension is positively correlated with the percentage of teachers who state that student behavior problems are determined by administrative rules. The positive correlation is observed in 20 of the 21 subsets of students. Next, we regress the individual student's experience with suspension on antisocial attitudes and on the indicator of administrative centralization jointly (Table 19). The results show that, with a student's antisocial attitudes held constant, a student has a greater probability of experiencing suspension in a school with a higher degree of centralized administrative control in disciplinary matters, as reflected by a larger percentage of its teachers' saying that serious student behavior problems are handled by administrative rules. This holds true generally for all the 21 subgroups of students in our analysis. In almost all these cases, however, rule centralization is a less powerful predictor of suspension than antisocial attitudes.

The empirical evidence presented above thus leaves little doubt about the importance of administrative structure in student suspension. As a school increases its administrative control over disciplinary matters, more students can expect to be suspended. Why is this the case? This question

cannot be readily answered here. However, a recent trend in the nation's schools seems to emphasize the separation of teaching from discipline; our data suggest that this practice may result in higher rates of suspension.

Student Governance and Suspension

In the Safe School Study, it was found that firm, fair, and consistent discipline were the basic qualities characterizing good student governance in a school. In a typical well governed school the rules are strictly enforced, classroom order is closely maintained, the principal is seen as firm, and both the rules and the enforcement of them are perceived as fair. In the Safe School Study report it was pointed out that this kind of student governance tended to reduce student violence and vandalism in the school. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that fair, firm, and consistent governance should also reduce the need for using suspensions.

To examine whether this is true, we combine the following nine variables to construct the Good Governance Scale which was the backbone of the requirement for fair, firm, and consistent discipline in the Safe School Study Report:

1) The percentage of students who report that the school rules are almost never strictly enforced

2) The percentage of students who report that the teachers at their school almost never keep order in class

3) The percentage of teachers who report that the teachers always maintain order in class

4) The percentage of students who disagree that their principal runs the school with a firm hand

5) The percentage of the students who believe that the school rules are almost never fair

6) The percentage of the students who believe that it is almost never true that in their school, the punishment for breaking the school rules is the same no matter who you are

7) The percentage of the students who believe that the teachers in their school are almost never fair

8) The percentage of the students who disagree with the statement that the "principal is fair"

9) The percentage of teachers who believe that "all students are treated equally" very much describes their school

Among these nine variables, (3) and (9) are positive indicators of good governance; the other seven are considered negative indicators. The first four variables measure the firmness and consistency dimensions, the remaining five measure the fairness dimension. The score on the scale is the weighted linear combination of these nine variables, with the weights being derived from a principal components factor analysis of intercorrelations among these variables[8].

A high score on the scale means the school is able to govern its students well and its governance is generally perceived as fair. As we relate the good governance score to the percentage of students with suspension experience, we find that good governance and suspensions are correlated negatively in all six of the subsets of schools in our analysis (see Table 20). This means that the well-governed schools suspend less frequently. In view of this, suspension cannot be considered essential to good student governance.

One may argue, however, that governance, good or bad, is a function of student behavior; thus an alternative interpretation of the negative correlations between suspension and good governance is that the schools with better student governance are simply schools where students are better behaved. With better student behavior, the schools therefore have fewer suspensions, because they have less need for them. To examine this alternative explanation, we further regress student suspension on good governance while holding constant the effects of student behavior and all other factors considered to this point (Table 20). The results show that even with student behavior taken into

consideration, the better governed schools still appear to have suspended fewer of their students.

The regression coefficients for the governance scales are smaller than the correlation coefficients of governance with suspension when student attitudes/behavior is not controlled. This means that in part, a high governance score may be attributed to better student behavior. But the regression coefficients are not small; one is as high as -.25. This implies that the governance scale is not merely a measure of student behavior, and that good governance practice does lower the suspension rate. The Safe School Study report also concluded that schools which received high scores on the governance scale did so not because they had an easier student population to work with; instead, it suggested that good governance resulted from a discipline policy which reflected the principal's leadership and the degree to which teachers and administrators cooperated in carrying out a discipline policy.

This further strengthens our conclusion that suspension is not essential to good student governance. The partial regression coefficients for good governance suggest that when schools are unable to govern well, they are more likely to use severe means of discipline such as suspension. This is further supported by the analysis conducted at the individual level (Table 21). In all 21 subsets, individual students' suspension experience is negatively correlated with the degree to which their schools are well governed. Moreover, when holding constant a student's attitudes, the probability of being suspended increases in a less well governed school (see Table 22).

In summary, the data seem to imply that suspension is not essential to the governance of students. However, the inability of schools to govern well

increases their reliance on suspension. Suspension appears to be a direct product of school discipline policy and practices.

V. Academic Performance and Suspension

It is often argued that (a) suspended students are academically unable to compete or catch up with other students, thus (b) they become uninterested in school and misbehave, and (c) as a consequence of their misbehavior, they are more likely to be suspended. Thus, if the needs of students with academic difficulties can be taken care of through special arrangements, it is argued, the amount of misbehavior at school will be decreased. It is also possible, however, that given the same behavior, a low achieving student may have a greater chance of getting suspended than a student with better academic performance. If academic bias is found to be contributing to student suspension, the policy implication would be that additional reduction of suspension can be achieved by reducing academic bias or by preventing such bias from influencing the disciplinary process.

Does academic bias play a role in student suspensions? Our data show that there is a positive correlation between the student suspension rate in a school and the average percentage of low ability students reported by all the teachers in the school (Table 23). This positive correlation is observed in all the six subsets of analysis. If we assume that teachers are generally making judgments about student ability, and that such judgments are comparable across schools, then the positive correlation would in fact suggest that low ability students are truly suspended more often than other students. If we take the teachers' report as the true measure of their students' ability, then we should ask why low ability students are more often suspended. There are two possibilities: The low ability students misbehave more, or they do

not misbehave more but are more severely punished for their misbehavior.

To inquire into these possibilities, we further regress the percentage of students with suspension experience in a school on both the student attitudes/behavior and the percentage of low ability students reported by the teachers, holding constant the impact of other factors which we have discussed up to this point (see Table 23). There are two important points which we must note about these results. First, with the percentage of low ability students entering the regression equation, there is a drop in the partial regression coefficient of student attitudes/behavior (compare Tables 23 and 20). At the same time the reverse is also true: when we control for student attitudes/behavior, there is a drop from the correlation coefficient between suspension and the percentage of low ability students to the partial regression coefficient of the percentage of low ability students on suspension. Such drops indicate that low ability students do misbehave more. Second, we notice that, even with student attitudes/behavior held constant, there is still a weak positive partial regression coefficient of the percentage of low ability students on suspension rates in all the six subsets of schools. In addition, the inclusion of the percentage of low ability students as reported by the teachers does increase the multiple R^2 from those reported in Table 20 to those reported in 23. This indicates that despite their share of misbehavior, the low ability students are more frequently suspended.

The data thus support both of the two possibilities which we mentioned earlier: the low ability students do misbehave more and therefore they get suspended more, and they also are more severely punished and therefore they get suspended still more often. When low ability students receive suspensions exceeding their share of misbehavior, the additional suspensions must

be clearly attributed to academic bias which operates to their disadvantage. We must ask why the low ability students should misbehave more?

It does not seem necessary that these two factors be connected. However, one reason may be that schools have been so structured that they favor the high ability students: students of low ability are left out of activities, receive few of the rewards of the school and are tempted to rebel (Hargreaves, 1967; Kelly and Pink, 1973; Pink, 1978; Polk and Schafer, 1972; Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Stinchcombe, 1964). Thus, the fact that low ability students misbehave more may also be, in part, a reflection of the impact of academic bias. While our data do not permit us to inquire into the actual reward structure in the school, all the evidence above, considered together, seems to support the hypothesis that academic bias plays a role in student suspensions.

It may be argued that academic bias is inevitable in schools. That the only way for schools to teach students successfully is by giving positive rewards for learning; and of course those who learn more will get more of the rewards. Or it may be impossible to staff a school with teachers who are themselves dedicated academics without them being biased in favor of the better students. These arguments may or may not be true; the fact remains that by the argument advanced here academic bias is harmful to low ability students.

The discussion above is based on the assumption that the percentage of low ability students as reported by the teachers truly measures the relative number of students who are indeed low in ability. We could also assume that this percentage simply measures the number of students who are merely <u>considered and labelled</u> by the teachers in a school as low in ability, rather than the number of students who are low in their <u>true or actual</u> ability. In other words, the criteria of judging students' ability may not always be the same from one school to another. If we accept this alternative assumption and interpret the percentage of low ability students as reported by the

teachers as measuring the relative number of students so labelled, would we come to the same conclusion as we have above? The answer is yes. Under this alternative assumption, however, the positive regression coefficient of the percentage of low ability students on suspension rate reported in Table 23 would mean that the students need not be truly low in their ability; as long as they are considered to have low ability they are more likely to be suspended by the school.

Still a third possibility that we may consider is that the percentage of low ability students as reported by the teachers in a school may not be a good indicator of the number of students with low ability at all. Instead, it may be considered as a manifestation of academic bias itself. This is possible because wherever academic bias is strong, the teachers may set higher standards and hence tend to consider more of their students low in ability. Thus, a higher average percentage of low ability students reported by the teachers in a school would reflect a stronger degree of academic bias in that school as compared to other schools. This interpretation is to some extent supported by the fact that, in general, teachers reported a rather high percentage of their students as having ability. In urban junior high schools, for example, teachers consider nearly 40% of their students as low in ability. The smallest percentage is reported among the suburban senior high schools, in which the teachers reported more than 27% of their students as low in ability. Following this interpretation, the results presented in Table 23 indicate the impact of academic bias on suspension: academic bias is related to student suspension in all six groups of schools. The stronger the bias is in the schools, the more students are likely to be considered as having low ability and the more vulnerable to being suspended the students become.

In discussing three different ways in which the results represented in Table 23 could be interpreted, we must note that our data are not subtle

enough to separate and test each interpretation. However, all three interpretations reach essentially the same conclusion: academic bias plays a role in student suspensions and low ability students are suspended more than expected, given the number of incidents of misbehavior attributed to them.

So far, we have been looking at school level data. The impact of academic bias can also be demonstrated at the individual level (Table 24). Here, we regress individual students' suspension experience on their antisocial attitude scores and on whether their grades are above average (the grade average is self-reported by the student). The results show that, holding constant a student's antisocial attitudes, the probability of being suspended is reduced if grades are above average (B or above). This holds true for all the 21 subgroups of students in our analysis. Then we further regress an individual student's suspension experience on the average percentage of low ability students reported by the teachers at his school, while again we hold the student's antisocial attitudes constant (Table 25). The percentage of low ability students, as reported by teachers, is here treated as a contextual variable to indicate the relative degree of academic bias in each school.

The results indicate that given a student's antisocial attitudes, the probability of being suspended increases in schools where teachers consider more of the students as low in ability. This means that there are two ways in which we can observe academic bias working against an individual student: (1) If academic performance is average or below average, the probability of receiving suspension increases, and (2) if the school has a greater emphasis on academic ability, the probability of suspension also increases.

Our data show both of these patterns. In the urban junior high schools, for example, a "C" student is 6% more likely to be suspended than a "B" student, while a student in a school where more teachers say the students

are of low ability is 4% more likely to be suspended than a student in a school where teachers do not generally have this impression. We may note that our data do not contain information about the actual behavior of individual students. But by holding constant the degree of antisocial attitude, the fact that a poorer academic record and a higher percentage of low ability students reported by teachers both increase an individual student's chances of receiving suspension still further strengthens our earlier conclusion that academic bias plays a role in student suspensions. This conclusion is collaborated by both the school level data and the individual level data.

VI. Racial Discrimination and Suspension

It has been reported elsewhere that a disproportionate number of minority students are suspended from the nation's schools (Edelman et al., 1975; Neill, 1976). The question is: can these high rates be interpreted as evidence of racial discrimination? The answer to this question depends on which of the two different conceptions of racial discrimination one accepts. Discrimination is seen as either (a) a disciplinary practice that is favorable to one group and unfavorable to another (e.g., regarding hat wearing by black males as disrespectful behavior: an ethnocentric view of cultural difference), or (b) unequal treatment of the same behavior.

To examine whether the different suspension rates are experienced by white and nonwhite students can be explained by their behavioral differences, we regress school suspension rate on the percentage of white students, while holding constant student attitudes/behavior and other factors treated earlier. The results in Table 26 show that even when we control for attitude/behavior differences, the suspension rate is apparently still higher among nonwhites

than whites, since the presence of more nonwhite students tends to increase the overall suspension rate in a school, and schools with more white students tend to have a lower suspension rate. This holds true for all the six subgroups of schools in our analysis, especially for the urban schools.

Since this equation controls on the attitudes/behavior scale, these results suggest that the higher suspension rate experienced by the minorities is not simply a matter of their more frequent misbehavior or antisocial attitudes. The Attitudes/Behavior Scale is not a perfect measure of misbehavior, of course, but entering it in the equation should reduce the importance of race and yet it remains a large and significant factor. To the extent that nonwhite minorities experience more suspensions than white students, after adjusting for their respective share of misbehavior, the additional suspension experienced by the nonwhite student is thus indicative of unequal treatment against them. The higher rate of suspension among the nonwhite minorities is therefore attributable to racial discrimination according to the second conception of racial discrimination discussed above.

Undoubtedly the definition of discrimination varies from one person to another; it is also a legal-political matter which changes from time to time. In any event, what is important here is that the white and the nonwhite do appear to be unequally treated. The same apparent inequality in treatment of white and nonwhite students appears in the analysis at the individual level. In Table 27 we regress the individual student's suspension experience on race and antisocial attitudes jointly. The results show that, given a student's antisocial attitudes, the probability of being suspended from school increases for nonwhites, and decreases for whites. This holds true among all the 21 subgroups of students in our analysis. In Table 28, we further introduce the student's academic performance, school governance, and other factors as control

variables into the regression equation. The basic finding remains: The probability of suspension is still higher for nonwhites than for whites. With all these results considered together, the data seem to give clear support to the hypothesis that racial bias is a contributing factor in student suspension.

It could be, however, that minority students are more disruptive in school in ways which are not completely revealed by their scores on the attitude or attitude/behavior scales. Such a hypothesis cannot be tested with these date, and hence cannot be disproved. On the whole, however, we do not think that such a hypothesis could completely explain these findings. If minority students did have high rates of misbehavior, their scores on the attitude scales should also be very high, and controlling on the attitude scale should sharply reduce the impact of race in predicting the probability of suspension. Otherwise, we are left hypothesizing that, for unknown reasons, minority students misbehave a great deal but also do not have anti-social attitudes--a hypothesis which is simply difficult to believe. In fact, introducing the attitude scale does not make that much difference. The average correlation of race with suspension across all the subgroups of the population is -.114 (Table 27); with the attitudes scale score controlled (Table 27) the average standardized regression coefficient for race is -.105, which is not much smaller.

There is one other alternative explanation. One may argue that, in general, nonwhite students are more likely to come from less affluent families. Thus, in comparison to white students, they may more likely suffer from poverty-related problems.

In order to examine whether higher rates of suspension for nonwhites can be explained away by poverty-related problems, we regress school suspension rate on the percentage of white students and the percentage of low economic

status students simultaneously. The percentage of low economic status students here is a linear combination of the percentage of students whose parents are unemployed or on welfare (as reported by the principal) and the percentage of students in the school free lunch program (as reported by the students themselves). These results show that, even when poverty-related problems are taken into consideration, the nonwhite students still experience more suspension in all subsets except rural senior high schools (Table 29). The higher suspension rate for the nonwhite students therefore cannot be explained away by their poverty or poverty-related problems.

The hypothesis that the higher suspension rate of nonwhites is a matter of unequal treatment and not simply a matter of poverty is supported even more strongly in the individual level analysis (Table 30). Here, we regress the individual student's suspension experience on the student's race and attitudes, while we hold constant receipt of free lunch at school and whether parents talk frequently about school. The results indicate that given a student's antisocial attitudes, the probability of being suspended from school increases for nonwhites, although having free lunch (or being poor) and having parents who rarely talk about school also increase such probability. This holds true for all the 21 subgroups of students in the analysis.

In summary, our data clearly support the hypothesis that nonwhite and white students are not equally treated. The inequality in treatment exists even when factors such as poverty, behavior/attitudes, academic performance, parental attention, attending a centralized school, etc., are considered. To the extent this is true, racial bias plays a role in suspension.

It is frequently argued that such bias would be removed by hiring more black teachers. To test this position, we compare the suspension rate of black students in schools where more than 80% of teachers are white to those

in schools in which less than 80% of the teachers are white (Table 31). For this comparison, we select only schools where a substantial number of black students were included in our sample (at least 10 of the 50 sampled), to insure that the black suspension rate could be reasonably calculated. We notice that in urban and rural communities, the suspension rates are essentially no different between those blacks who attend schools with more white teachers and those who attend schools with fewer white teachers. In suburban communities the black students who attend schools with more minority teachers have a higher suspension rate than those who attend schools with more white teachers. This suggests that black students are not necessarily better off with minority teachers than they are with white teachers. This, however, should not be construed as contradicting the hypothesis that racial bias plays a role in suspensions. The comparable suspension rates for white students in the same schools are generally lower than those for black students (see Table 31). Since black students are more often suspended regardless of the number of minority teachers, this suggests to us that racial bias may be institutional in nature. It is institutional in the sense that the bias is inherent in at least some of the school systems and is perhaps shared by both white and nonwhite teachers alike. We do not have the data to inquire into the actual racial attitudes of teachers and other school personnel, but the data presented above certainly suggest that the reduction of the high suspension rate among minority students requires fundamental safeguards against institutional bias; simply increasing the number of minority teachers in itself will not bring about more equal treatment for the minority students.

Some Concluding Comments

In this paper we have found that student suspension has a basis in the attitudes and behavior of students. However, student misbehavior, although important, is not the only factor determining whether a student will or will not be suspended from school. Students' chances of being suspended are also affected by their teachers' perceptions and beliefs, their school's administrative structure in handling disciplinary matters, and the presence of certain institutional biases in their schools. To be specific, we have found that, in addition to their behavior, students' chances of being suspended increase if:

1) Teachers are seen by students as relatively uninterested in them
2) Teachers believe that students are incapable of solving problems
3) Disciplinary matters are handled largely by administrative rules
4) The school is not able to provide consistent and fair governance
5) There is a relatively high degree of academic bias among school personnel
6) There is a relatively high degree of racial bias present at the school

Undoubtedly, we have not measured all factors in student suspension. However, we have established a fundamental characteristic of student suspension: It is not simply a matter of student misbehavior, but also a matter of the way in which different schools operate. Moreover, we have found that is is more the ways in which different schools operate than the ways in which students in different schools behave that affect suspension rates.

As shown in Table 32, the six school factors are far more powerful in explaining the school suspension rate than student attitudes and behavior. In partitioning the variance, we attributed to individual students the responsibility for causing suspension only to the extent that suspensions are explainable by their antisocial attitudes and misbehavior. All other variables that further explain the student suspension rate are considered responsibilities of the schools. Notice here that we are not making a distinction between individual student variables and school variables. Rather, the distinction that we are making is between what should and should not be student's responsibilities, in accordance with the general rule of equal behavior deserving equal discipline. For this reason, students' racial background and their ability, as viewed by the teachers, are not treated together with their antisocial attitudes and misbehavior, since minority students and low ability students, like others, should be suspended no more than their antisocial attitudes and misbehavior would warrant. The partition of variance reflects this consideration. The variance in student suspensions explained uniquely by the school responsibility factors is still large and sufficient to attest to the important role of the schools in suspensions.

Now, to be cautious in our approach, let us take one step backward and repartition the explained variance in student suspensions with the assumption that schools are bias-free; that is, they are free of academic bias, free of bias against minority students, and free of favoritism for the students of the majority race. From this assumption, we shall consider not only that minority and low ability students are more antisocial in their attitudes and that they misbehave more as our scale and analysis have shown (and they in fact paid their dues--being suspended more--for this), but also that there are other suspendable personal characteristics unique among minority and low ability

students which our attitude and behavior scale is unable to detect and measure. Following this assumption, we therefore repartition the explained variance in student suspensions by treating race and low ability as two additional variables measuring students' attitudes and behavior (Table 33). We notice that, even excluding minority race status and low ability status of the students, the four school responsibility factors (i.e., 1 through 4) account for more unique variance in students suspension than do the three student responsibility factors in four of the six subgroups of schools analyzed.

In conclusion, we can state that while the question most frequently asked about student suspensions is, "What did the student do wrong at school?", our data indicate that it does not lead us to an answer that will assist us in understanding suspension. It may not be the most productive or most important question to ask. Rather, our data suggest that the most productive question ought to be, "What kind of school did the student go to, and how was that school run?" Student suspensions is a matter of student misbehavior, but it is more a matter of how the school treats its students.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Goss v. Lopez, 95 Supreme Court 729, 1975.

2. See Wood v. Strickland, 95 Supreme Court 992, 1975. For a general discussion on the implications of Wood v. Strickland and Goss v. Lopez, see Ronald J. Anson and Peter J. Kuriloff (eds.), Students' Rights to Due Process: Professional discretion and liability, Educational Resources Division, Capital Publications, Inc., 1975, and see also Shirley Boes Neill, Suspension and Expulsions: Current trends in school policies and programs, National School Public Relations Association, 1976.

3. Interestingly, data in Table 35 indicate that students who are suspended are particularly likely to give anti-social responses to Items 2, 6, 7, and 8. Thus, suspended students endorse both middly deviant (e.g., cheating and cutting school) and extremely deviant (e.g., stealing, rob other students) behaviors.

4. All of these six attitudinal and behavioral indicators are negatively correlated with the level of suspension or the percentage of students with suspension experience (See Table 36).

5. Although tests of significance are shown in Table 9 and the other tables, they are rarely discussed in this report. In general, statistical significance is apparent in the regularity of the results across subgroups. For example in Table 9, there is only one chance in 64 that random sampling would produce 6 separate negative regression coefficients. In some of our tables only 5 of the coefficients are in the expected direction; there are 7 chances in 64 of this occurring by chance. In some other tables, we separate the data by grade level as well as type of school, giving us 21 separate coefficients. There is a 1% chance of obtaining 17 of the 21 signs in the predicted direction, and a less than 5% chance of obtaining 15 or more signs in the expected direction. By these criteria every variable in the multiple regression equation reported here is statistically significant when the pattern of results across subgroups is compared.

6. All four negative partial regression coefficients of teachers being not interested in students are statistically non-significant at .05 level. Of the seventeen positive regression coefficients, nine are significant at or above .05 level, the other eight are not. Considered together, the partial regression coefficients are not significant in urban junior high schools and in rural senior high schools; they are significant in the four other subsets of schools.

7. This reverse relationship is possible in this case because we may reasonably expect that the belief in student incompetence, if communicated to or detected by the students, may antagonize the students and therefore heighten their misbehavior as an expression of resentment and protest. In this interpretation, teachers' believing in student incompetence has both a direct effect and an indirect effect on suspension by further heightening the amount of student misbehavior in school.

8. In operation, the first four variables and last five are separately scaled first. Two subscales so derived are then scaled together. The two-staged scaling procedure was employed for reasons of convenience and conceptual clarity.

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